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**ILO DIRECTOR-GENERAL MEETS HIS EXCELLENCY DR. BASHAR AL ASSAD,
PRESIDENT OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC**

BEIRUT (ILO News) – The Director General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Mr. Juan Somavia today concluded an official mission to Syria, the highlight of which was a meeting with His Excellency Dr. Bashar Al Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Somavia also met with Her Excellency, Ms. Asama Al-Assad and Prime Minister Mohammed Naji Al Otari, and the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, Mr. Abdullah Dardari, as well as holding meetings with the tripartite constituents, notably the Minister of Social Affairs and Labour, with whom he discussed the impact of the global economic crisis and the work of ILO technical cooperation projects in the country.

Among the issues discussed are the economic reform programme, labour legislations, social dialogue, youth employment and local training as employment and job creation will be a central element of Syria's 11th five-year plan, which will be developed as from 2010.

Somavia highlighted the many entrepreneurial activities undertaken by women breadwinners, and discussed the national youth employment initiative launched under the patronage of the first lady, Her Excellency, Ms. Asama Al-Assad, specifically expanding ILO support to Know-About Business (KAB) programme.

The visit comes directly after a three day Arab Employment Forum, at which government, worker and employer representatives from 22 Arab states agreed on measures to promote employment and social protection in response to the crisis in the region.

Mr. Somavia said that, "Syria has so far been less affected than some Arab countries, due in part to prudent financial policies. Like other countries in the region, Syria is facing difficulties as a result of the crisis but is addressing them with important policies to enhance social protection, employment, and social dialogue".

The ILO has been requested to conduct a study on the impact of the global financial and economic crisis on Syria with a focus on employment and social security in line with the ILO Global Jobs Pact. The study will identify areas where targeted policy measures can enhance Syria's capacities in responding to current and future employment

and social protection challenges, and to develop effective policy reform proposals.

Mr. Somavia emphasized that, “Measures to strengthen social security in Syria are already under way including workers in the informal economy as part of the country’s Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP), signed in February 2008 by the ILO’s tripartite constituents: the Syrian Minister of Social Affairs and Labour, the General Federation of Trade Unions, and the Damascus Chamber of Industry and its Suburbs.”

The DWCP gives priority to improving the capacity of ILO constituents to implement labour policies and legislation, increase employment opportunities, and enhance social protection.

Before departing from Syria Mr. Somavia said, “I am encouraged by the authority’s concern for employment and social protection. The ILO, working together with social partners and the government can help Syria achieve its development goals.”